



## Review

## Interpersonal skills development in Generation Y student nurses: A literature review



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## SUMMARY

**Background:** Student nurses require training in the development of the interpersonal skills that are required for therapeutic nurse–patient relationships. This training should be provided within the basic education of nurses in a higher education institution. As the birth years of Generation Y range from the early 1980s to the late 1990s this generation is of the age group that enrolls in higher education institutions. The unique learning needs of this generation necessitate a review of teaching strategies used in the development of interpersonal skills.

**Objectives:** The aim of this study is to present a literature review on the significance and development of interpersonal skills in Generation Y nursing students through nursing education.

**Methodology:** Literature searches were conducted on databases—with the use of Cumulative Index of Nursing and Allied Health (CINAHL), Clinical key, PubMed and Google Scholar—using specific keywords and a timeframe of 2005 to 2013. All relevant articles were read critically.

**Findings:** Interpersonal skills are at the core of the nurse–patient relationship. Meaningful interaction is recognised in Swanson's theory of “informed caring”. Debates, case studies, role-playing, storytelling, journaling, simulations and web page links to audio and video clips are some of the teaching strategies which can develop the interpersonal skills needed for meaningful interactions.

**Conclusion:** Teaching strategies embedded in the deconstruction pedagogies stimulate critical, analytical thinking through methods which complement the unique learning styles of Generation Y learners.

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## Introduction

A relationship that develops between a nurse who is competent in interpersonal skills and the patient will result in empowerment of the patient, as the patient perceives an increased sense of solidarity, security, health and wellbeing through a therapeutic relationship (Halldorsdottir, 2008).

Communication is the foundation of all human relationships (Searle et al., 2009). It is through communication between the nurse and the patient that a bond is created (Halldorsdottir, 2008). These views are shared by Legg (2011), who states that a relationship of trust can be established through good communication. Through trust the patient can feel confident in the ability of the nurse and have faith in the nurse's goodwill. Good communication forms the foundation for a therapeutic and supportive relationship between the nurse and the patient (Searle et al., 2009).

Interpersonal skills are described as skills that are required for communication and interaction with others and these skills play a significant role in creating a therapeutic nurse–patient relationship (Stein-Parbury, 2000). In South Africa, The scope of practice for nurses and midwives

requires professional nurses to ‘initiate and maintain a therapeutic relationship’ (Department of Health, 2013, p.5). Therefore the interpersonal skills required for a therapeutic nurse patient–relationship are facilitated during the course of the undergraduate nursing programme.

Individuals of Generation Y are of the age where they continue to enter into universities and colleges. Learners who belong to the Y generation are known for communicating and interacting through social networking sites. Generation Y learners are technologically competent, collaborative and work well in teams. They like to express their opinions and want creative ways to solve problems (Gibson, 2009). Teaching strategies should harmonise with the values and learning needs of Generation Y learners.

The training and competency evaluation of interpersonal skills is an integral part of undergraduate nurse training. It is therefore important to identify the unique learning needs of Generation Y learners and the appropriate teaching strategies for interpersonal skill development to take place successfully (White and Kiegaldie, 2011).

## Problem Statement

Communication between the youth has been found to increasingly occur through social networking sites. Sites such as Facebook, Twitter and MySpace are increasingly utilised by Generation Y (Roblyer et al.,

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2010). Social networking sites have created a platform for interaction and networking with friends and family and, when used responsibly, have been found to increase closeness to friends and cultivate a sense of belonging (DeAndrea et al., 2012).

Instant messaging, sending photographs from cell phones and playing online games are just some of the ways in which Generation Y interacts with one another. Many may even prefer online communication to a telephonic conversation. For this generation online communication does not exclude face-to-face communication and neither do they consider on-line communication to be impersonal (Oblinger and Hawkins, 2005).

However, does the level of social interaction on social networking sites influence the interpersonal skills that these young individuals require in a working environment? In the nursing profession student and professional nurses are required to interact with patients and health care professionals in order to provide nursing care. This interaction involves face-to-face communication (Stein-Parbury, 2000). During the education of nursing students apart from development of knowledge and psychomotor skills, interpersonal skills needed for communication in a therapeutic nurse–patient relationship also need to be developed (Ward et al., 2012).

Taking into consideration the unique characteristics and needs of the Generation Y learner this review article will consider the question of how interpersonal skills in Generation Y learners can be developed in order to prepare them for interaction with patients where they will be required to act with creativity, compassion, tolerance and honesty.

The following research questions were used to guide the literature search:

1. What are the current teaching strategies for interpersonal skill development in nursing programmes?
2. What are teaching strategies which will develop interpersonal skills of Generation Y nursing students?

## Methodology

Literature searches were conducted on databases Cumulative Index of Nursing and Allied Health (CINAHL), Clinical key, PubMed and Google Scholar. The following keywords were used during searches: “nursing care”, “caring”, “nurse–patient relationship”, “interpersonal skills”, “communication”, “Language”, “Generation Y”, “millennial generation”, “social networking”, “nurse education”, “student nurse”, “current teaching methods”, “teaching methods”, “interpersonal skills training” and “practice development”. The timeframe covered was from 2005 to 2013. Sixty three relevant articles were read critically.

Searches were initially broad and were narrowed with the use of more specific search topics. The researcher retrieved relevant articles that were read, abstracted, and critiqued by analysing and synthesising the information. The articles were sorted into different categories. Similar to analysing qualitative data, important themes were identified. The thematic analysis allowed the researcher to find patterns and regularities, as well as inconsistencies. The patterns that were of greatest relevance to the phenomenon under investigation were then pursued to develop an argument and provide a context for the research.

## Findings from the Literature Review

Generation Y birth years range from the early 1980s to the late 1990s (White and Kiegaldie, 2011). This generation has also been referred to as the “millennium generation” or the “millennials” (Lower, 2008) and is known for growing up in a high-technology environment (Liu et al., 2011). Their social interaction and communication have been greatly influenced through social networking sites (O’Keeffe et al., 2011).

The interpersonal skills necessary for the development of a therapeutic nurse–patient relationship are facilitated during the training of student nurses. The literature review that follows will address the

significance of interpersonal skills and the development of interpersonal skills in Generation Y nursing students through nursing education.

### *The Significance of Interpersonal Skills*

The nurse uses scientific knowledge and skills in her provision of care to the patient. Central to nursing practice is the role of caring (Potter and Perry, 2007). This is so because patients with physical and emotional distress are in need of care, which nurses are mandated to provide (Askinazi, 2004). The caring approach of the nurse during interaction with the patient forms the basis of the nurse–patient relationship (Potter and Perry, 2007). Hagerty and Patusky (2003) concur that the nurse–patient relationship is considered to be the foundation of nursing care.

At the core of the nurse–patient relationship is interpersonal skills, which facilitate the development of a constructive and effective relationship. The ability to interact effectively with another person is referred to as “interpersonal skills” (Johnson, 2009). Self-disclosure, trust, communication, expression of feelings and helpful listening and responding, as some of the interpersonal skills that can be developed further in order to establish and maintain therapeutic relationships. These psychosocial actions occur in a therapeutic relationship.

Swanson’s theory of nursing as “informed caring” recognises the psychosocial actions that take place during the rendering of nursing care. Meaningful interaction is described by Stein-Parbury (2000) through the five processes of caring in the theory of “informed caring”. The first process focuses on the nurse’s intrinsic belief in people and the meaning that the nurse attaches to health events which develops through an inherent process of self-awareness. Once the nurse has an established viewpoint she is able to understand the meaning of the health of patients.

In the second process the nurse uses interpersonal skills such as listening, understanding and exploring in order to ‘know’ patients. The third process is referred to as “being with” patients and this is achieved through being fully present and available to patients. Interpersonal skills such as attending and listening can be effective in this process.

Once the nurse is present ‘with’ patients the last two processes of the theory, which involve “doing for” patients and “enabling” patients to do for themselves can be applied. While “doing for” patients is associated with caring for the physical needs, it is also related to the nurses’ psychosocial interaction with the patient during interventions. Interaction at this stage is dependent on the development of interpersonal skills such as comforting and supporting. While the interpersonal skills used to encourage patients to participate in their own health care are required in the final process of “enabling” patients in the theory of “informed caring”.

In a study conducted on patient participation in nursing care Larsson et al. (2007) found that patient participation in his or her own care depended on interpersonal interaction between the nurse and the patient. The nurse–patient relationship must be of such a nature that it enables patients to participate in their own care. In order for patients to participate in their care they must have insight into their condition and care. This category was termed “insight through consideration” and the knowledge of the patient was considered to be augmented by the nurse’s communication of relevant information to the patient in a safe environment.

Finfgeld-Connett (2007) also identifies a similar process in nursing care where the nurse displays expert nursing practice by assessing the needs of the patient and then implementing appropriate interventions. These interventions may involve doing, advocating and empowering patients to care for themselves. Expert nursing, interpersonal sensitivity and intimate relationships are identified as the attributes of the process of nursing. The nurse allows for interpersonal sensitivity by practicing attentive listening, eye contact, touch and verbal reassurance. “Intimate relationship” refers to the nurse–patient relationship in which caring has developed.

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